



Saint Louis County

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Tom Rukavina
County Commissioner

July 13, 2017

The Honorable Rick Nolan
U.S. House of Representatives
2366 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Via email: Will.Mitchell@mail.house.gov

Dear Congressman Nolan:

As St. Louis County Commissioners, we're writing this letter in support of H.R. 3115, the Superior National Forest Land Exchange Act of 2017. We understand this legislation will require the U.S. Forest Service and PolyMet Mining to quickly move forward and complete the NorthMet Land Exchange. We know that the enactment of the bill will not authorize any mining to occur, but passage and a timely resolution of the exchange will help this project move forward quickly and would bring many good-paying mining and mining-related jobs back to northern St. Louis County.

A comprehensive environmental review of the NorthMet Mining Project and Land Exchange under the National Environmental Policy Act and the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act has already been completed. The Final Environmental Impact Statement was approved by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in March 2016 and by the U.S. Forest Service in its January 2017 Final Record of Decision, and yet the land exchange is still has not been completed.

The exchange and this bill are in the best interest of St. Louis County, the state of Minnesota, and the United States of America. Under H.R.3115 as written and as outlined in the ROD, PolyMet would acquire 6,650 acres of federal surface land where PolyMet owns and controls the underlying private minerals and therefore resolving a conflict. The federal land is not easily accessible to the public and has little value or use, because of the fact that it is surrounded by current and former mining activities. It is largely inaccessible and lacks road or other public access.

In return, the United States would get 6,690 acres of non-federal, private lands which will be protected and further the goals of the Superior National Forest Plan. These lands have higher public values than the federal land for wetland and open space conservation, wildlife and accessible for public recreational use. Specifically, Hay Lake, the largest parcel outlined in the exchange at 4,651 acres, lies along the Pike River, which is in the headwaters to Lake Vermilion. Both residents and visitors to St. Louis County will benefit greatly with access to this property.

As St. Louis County Commissioners we support your efforts to bring a quick closure to this process through Congressional action. We applaud you for your efforts, particularly by your bipartisan approach for the legislation to quickly pass through the U.S. Congress.

Please let us know if we can be of any further assistance in moving this matter forward. You can contact Commissioner Rukavina directly at (218) 365-8200.

Sincerely,



Thomas Rukavina
4th District St. Louis County Commissioner
Chair, Environment & Natural Resources Committee



Frank Jewel
1st District St. Louis County Commissioner



Pete Stauber
5th District St. Louis County Commissioner



Keith Nelson
6th District St. Louis County Commissioner



Mike Jugovich
7th District St. Louis County Commissioner